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DEBATES ON TURKEY'S SOFT POWER IN THE AUSTRIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This paper provides a brief overview of Turkey's soft power in Austria through the example of the faith-based public diplomacy institution ATİB (Avusturya Türkiye İslam Birliği, Türkisch-Islamische Union in Österreich), a branch of the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Turkey (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı). It addresses the significance of ATİB with regard to the religious and cultural needs of the Turkish Muslim community in Austria and the negative perceptions of Turkey's soft power strategy in this country. The paper also focuses on the current challenges faced by the ATİB, as well as by Austria's Muslim community in general, as a result of the Law on Islam that was adopted in 2015 (Islamgesetz 2015) and the accompanying discussions around Muslim associations financed from abroad. The research design is primarily based on a critical discourse analysis of political and academic debates about the ATİB, the 2015 Islam Law, and their catalyzing effect on Islamophobia in Austria.

Keywords: Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Diyanet, ATİB, Turkey, Austria, Islamophobia

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Introduction

After the first coup of the Freedom Party in Austria (FPÖ) in 1999, which was preceded by an anti-foreigner (and especially anti-Muslim) campaign and followed by the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobia in Austria intensified (Hafez, 2010). Muslim immigrants in particular continued to be a focus of political debates, where Islam was represented and stereotyped as incompatible with European values in the public discourse (Wets, 2006). Due to the long historical presence of Islam in Europe which has been expanded considerably by recent migrations, the discussions also focus on the outstanding features of Islam, as Basam Tibi emphasizes:

> "[T]he problem is not the number of Muslim people living in Europe, but rather what Islam is coming to Europe. Is it European Islam, enlightened Islam compatible and consonant with the civilizational identity of Europe, or is it Shari'a-Islam? This is the real issue and this is what the future of Europe is all about." (Tibi, 2008, 71).

The content of the debates held in public space varies in regard to the topics encompassed and the conclusions commonly reached. Particularly since the phenomenon of radicalization associated with the Islamic religion has become an increasingly tangible element of public discourse in Austria, the breadth of these debates has widened. We can see this, for example, in the response of the former interior minister, Herbert Kickl (Freedom Party of Austria), to the decision to declare the headscarf ban in elementary schools unconstitutional:

> "In its decision on the headscarf ban, the Constitutional Court seems to have forgotten for which type of state the constitution, the guardian of which it is intended to be, was written - namely for a democratic constitutional state, in which fundamental and freedom rights are guaranteed, and not for an Islamic Republic" (Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub – FPÖ, 2020, December 11).[2]

[2] Translated by the author.

Due to the large numbers of Muslims in Austria[3], the public discourse is also focused on the integration of the Muslim population in Europe, and Islamophobic incidents including discrimination against Muslims in the areas of employment, education, and religious practices. As we can see from the 'Anti-Muslim Racism Report' for 2020, anti-Muslim hate crimes and Islamophobic incidents in Austria rose by a third over the course of the reporting period, from 2019 to 2020 (Antimuslimischer Rassismus Report, 2020).

In recent years, origin-oriented religious institutions have also featured more and more frequently in the Austrian public discourse. Defined for the purposes of this research as origin-oriented institution we understand associations that are initiated by diaspora living in Austria or foreign state organized associations manly for promoting culture, language and religion of the country of origin. Among the most prominent and controversial of those currently operating in Austria, noteworthy examples include Islamische Föderation (IF) and Österreichisch-türkische Föderation (ATF) – Avusturya Türk Federasyonu (Addendum, 2020, May 18). In this context, the Turkish faith-based institution ATIB is of particular interest, due to its important role in the Turkish state's expanding soft-power approach to foreign policy.

The following paper takes a closer look at the origin-oriented faith based public diplomacy institution ATİB (Avusturya Türkiye *İslam* Birliği, Türkisch-Islamische Union in *Österreich*), a branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet *İşleri* Başkanlığı) — hereinafter referred to as Diyanet. The aim of this paper is not to deal with political developments in Turkey, but to explain the backlash against Turkey's soft power in Austria, the allegations against the ATİB, and the challenges faced by Turkish Muslims in the country since 2015, when the Islam Law ignited a new wave of public discussions and restrictions (Islamgesetz 2015). Before starting with the core content of the paper, it is necessary to explain the theoretical concept of soft power and its main instrument, public diplomacy (Nye 2004, 2011).

[3] According to the research report 'Muslim Diversity - A Compass on Everyday Religious Practice in Austria' from 2017, around 202.901 Muslims have Austrian citizenship, and 114.119 Muslims have Turkish citizenship. Muslims in Austria with Turkish migration background are the biggest Muslim group in Austria followed by the Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina (50.995) Former Yugoslavia (21.419) and Macedonia (14.722) (Aslan et al., 2017, 25-29)

Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

The term soft power is also known as the 'other face of power', and as 'power by attraction.' It is recognized for its potential to shape the preferences or actions of other countries through benignity (how an agent relates to others), brilliance (how an agent does things to produce admiration or respect), and beauty (agent's relations to ideals, visions and values) (Nye, 2004, X, 5; Nye, 2011, 92; Vuving, 2009, 8ff). States usually use power to achieve political goals (Nye 2011: 81). In contrast to hard power, which relies on the subsidiaries of military power (threat or force) and economic power (payments and sanctions), soft power's primary currencies are culture, values, policies, and institutions (Nye, 2004, 31; Nye, 2011, 84).

Despite criticisms that question soft power's relevance and its clarity and utility as a theoretical concept (Fan, 2008; Hocking, 2005; Pells, 1997), Nye claims that it is actually hard power which is declining in popularity and relevance. This is largely, Nye argues, due to the mounting expenses, both financial and social, which are accrued not only through the use of force itself, but also through the measures required for its justification and popular support (Nye, 2004, 19f). In the absence of force, soft power can be a source of attraction promoted by governments or non-profit organizations (ibd., 17, 122). According to the author:

> "It is possible to get many desired outcomes without having much tangible power over others. For example, some loyal Catholics may follow the pope's teaching on capital punishment not because of a threat of excommunication but out of respect for his moral authority. Or some radical Muslim fundamentalists may be attracted to support Osama bin Laden's actions not because of payments or threats, but because they believe in the legitimacy of his objectives." (ibd., 2).

However, an oft-noted weakness of soft power is its difficult and time-consuming implementation into government strategy. Furthermore, the instruments of soft-power are such that it cannot be entirely controlled by governments. Therefore, it is said that "soft power […] is hard to use, easy to lose, and costly to re-establish" (Nye, 2011, 83f). Additionally, Brannagan & Giulianotti (2018, 1140) identify the phenomenon of "soft disempowerment" which refers to the potential "unintended and weakening consequences" which can result from soft power strategies. They go on to explain that soft disempowerment commonly arises from three practices: "contravening international laws and rules," "failing to uphold international conventions or standards on global development," and acting in ways that are perceived to "have direct and negative impacts on other individual nations or communities of nations" (ibd., 1152ff). Whereas soft power is an attempt to wield "attraction" in foreign policy, soft disempowerment describes the effects of "unattractiveness," due to actions that are considered unacceptable, on the perceptions of nations in foreign countries (ibd., 1152).

Cultural activities which promote the foreign policy interests of a state by building a positive image (Hubinger, 2006: 85; Pajtnika, 2014, 100) fall under the domain of cultural diplomacy and soft power. Apart from promoting the culture and identity of the nation in question, other activities aim to disseminate cultural values and encourage public engagement, such as the negotiation of treaties on cultural cooperation, and the maintenance of ties with expatriate communities (Pajtnika, 2014, 95, 103f). Cummings (2003, 1) sees cultural diplomacy as an exchange of aspects of culture among nations and their people to achieve a better understanding among states. In order to experience benefits from cultural diplomacy, it is necessary to engender attraction through public diplomacy, which is regarded as one of the key instruments of soft power (Melissen, 2005, 4).

> It is the "government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies." (Tuch, 1990, 3).

Along with communicating information and promoting a positive image, public diplomacy aims at building long-term relationships to create a conducive environment for government policies (Nye, 2011: 105). Some authors do not believe that public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are one in the same, but nevertheless consider public diplomacy an important

tool for the dissemination and exchange of culture and values between one country and the general public abroad (Pajtnika, 2014, 101). These efforts can easily be dismissed as an attempt to manipulate of foreign populations (Melissen, 2005, 11). Public diplomacy targets the general public, non-official groups, individuals, and organizations abroad (ibd., 5) in order to engage with the foreign audience and establish long term relationships (ibd., 21). There are three important dimensions of public diplomacy function to create a conducive environment for government policies: daily communication, strategic communication, and the development of lasting relationships (Nye, 2011, 105).

As Nye observes, the "effectiveness of public diplomacy is measured by minds changed" (ibid., 107). In this respect, several activities must be undertaken in order to influence the public opinion of another state through establishing a positive perception of one country. One of the first examples of a public diplomacy institution is the Alliance Française, founded in 1883, which sought to popularize French culture and language as well as to restore national prestige after the Franco-Prussian war abroad (Nye, 2004, 102). Other noteworthy examples of public diplomacy institutions include the German Goethe Institute, which promotes German language and culture worldwide (Goethe Institut, n.d.); the British Council, which also works closely with the British foreign ministry to promote the English language and international relations (British Council, n.d.); and the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research, which is an advocate of international cooperation in education, science, and research and owned by the Republic of Austria (OeAD, 2021, September 2).

Faith-based institutions have also become increasingly active in public diplomacy. Because religions are often transnational in nature, they have particular potential to transcend national boundaries to promote certain cultures and values. If we start from a broader understanding of culture as a set of practices and values which create meaning for society (Nye 2004: 11), religion can be used as a "subject and medium" of cultural diplomacy (Lenozowski, 2009, 82, 87) or a cultural element of soft power (Golan 2018). Examining several transnational religious actors, including Roman Catholics, American Evangelical Protestants, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Haynes (2016, 5) came to the conclusion that each actor

> seeks to use […] 'religious soft power' to advance their interests […] all wish to see the spread and development of certain values and norms, which impact on international security and order."

Emergence of the Muslim religious community in Austria

The diplomatic relations between Austria and Turkey extend back as far as 1574, when the first diplomatic mission of the Habsburg Monarchy (or Danubian Monarchy) in Constantinople was recorded. In 1791, the first Ottoman Embassy was opened in Vienna. With the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the "Danubian monarchy," legalized under international law in 1908, the Islamic religion has had a long historical presence on Austrian territory. To institutionalize Islam within the state, Austria-Hungary issued a Law on Islam in 1912, pertaining to the recognition and rights of those in the country who were followers of Islam.[4] One of the outcomes of this law was that the adherents of Islam were granted official recognition as a religious community,[5] which was unique in Western Europe at the time. In 1932, the Islamic Cultural Federation (Islamischer Kulturbund) was established to unite the Muslims in Austria, including prominent converts (Windhanger, 2008, 33f). It was later dissolved by the Nazi regime in 1938, after which the 1912 Law on Islam was largely forgotten until the end of World War II.

Since Austria needed workers to rebuild the country after the destruction of the Second World War, the government began negotiating bilateral agreements with foreign countries to facilitate reconstruction. Turkey and Austria signed the first agreement on labor recruitment (Anwerbeabkommen*)* in 1969 which enabled 'guest workers' (Gastarbeiter) to come

[4] The basis of the Austrian legal framework concerning Religious Societies is freedom of religion guaranteed in the Austrian Constitution as well as the guarantee of freedom of religion and conscience found in the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals ("Staatsgrundgesetz") of 1867 and the Law on recognition of Religious Societies ("Anerkennungsgesetz für Religionsgesellschaften") of 1874. (Bundeskanzleramt 2019)

[5] StGG- Staatsgrundgesetz - Basic Law of 21 December 1867 on the General Rights of Nationals in the Kingdoms and Länder represented in the Council of the Realm, RGBl. Nr. 142/1867.

to Austria from Turkey. As a result of the labor migration, the number of Muslims in Austria, especially those from Turkey and ex-Yugoslavia, grew significantly during the 1960s. By 1974, approximately 31.270 Turkish immigrants had arrived in Austria (Lichtenberger, 2000). The majority of those workers stayed in the country and were later joined by their families through the process of family reunification. The substantial number of Turkish immigrants coming to work and live in Austria created a growing demand for organizations which would represent the Muslim faith.

The Islamic law of 1912, which remained in oblivion after the collapse of the monarchy, was rediscovered in the national library by the Bosnian scholar Smail Balić. He and other Muslim intellectuals saw it as a basis for the creation of a religious community in Austria. Together with the Association of Muslim Social Service, which was working on religious issues and the provision of humanitarian aid, they campaigned for an appropriate legal framework for incorporating Austria's Muslim community (Strobl, 1997, 29; Sticker, 2008, 3). In 1971, the association applied for approval to establish a religious community based on the Islam Law from 1912, which resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Faith Community of Austria (IFCA- Islamic Faith Community in Austria or IGGiÖ- Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich). It was recognized as a Public Law Corporation (Grabherr et al., 2019, 40) responsible for the official administration of religious affairs and the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in public schools (IGGÖ, n.d.). Today, the IFCA claims to represent all Muslims living in Austria (Hafez, 2013, 230), however, not all Muslim communities are represented in the IFCA's High Council. Still the IFCA has the privilege of playing the role of mediator on issues of government cooperation, thereby limiting the consultation between other Muslim communities and the state. The former IFCA president, Fuat Sanac, was heavily criticized for approving the Islam Law 2015 (Grabherr et al., 2019: 42; Ortadoğu, 2013,176; Stricker, 2008, 9).

The Faith-based Public Diplomacy Institution ATIB and its Critics

The Turkish state was increasingly apprehensive of the growing number of non-governmental Turkish-Islamic associations in Austria, e.g. *Österreich*-Türkische Förderation (ATF), Union Islamischer Kulturzentren (UIKZ) and Islamische Föderation (IF), and their influence "in the Islamic religious field" (Hafez, 2006, 70; Hafez, 2013, 230). For this reason, it established

the faith-based public diplomacy institution ATİB in 1990, as a branch of the Turkish Diyanet[6] (Bauer, 2016, 23; Grabherr et al., 2019, 40; Kroissenbrunner, 2001, 23). This institution soon rose to become the largest[7] mosque association of Turkish Muslims in Austria (Bauer, 2016, 23f). According to the mission statement of Diyanet in Turkey, it is a particular concern that its branches abroad "protect Muslims from assimilation, strengthen their national identity, and promote integration in their new living space" (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, n.d.). Like other Diyanet-linked organizations in Europe, ATİB claims to represent 'Turkish Islam,' which is portrayed as compatible with modernity and democracy (*Çitak*, 2013, 177). Up until the 2015 Islam Law (Islamgesetz 2015) was passed in Austria, the chairman of the ATİB was always a diplomat from the Turkish embassy. Additionally, the roughly sixty imams in the ATİB mosques were sent from Turkey as employees of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Bauer, 2016, 24; Grabherr et al., 2019, 40). The imams based their work and preaching on legal opinions (fatwas) of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. Like in Turkey, ATİB promotes the Hanafi[8] School of law, one of the four most widespread schools of Sunni Islamic law. Because the Hanafi School had also shaped the Muslim community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was also the body of law that had been recognized by the Islam Law of 1912 (Grabherr et al., 2019, 41).[9]

However, ATİB's associations didn't take part in IFCA until 2011. One reason for this is the nature of the relationship between state and religion in Austria. The internal, self-determined structure of the IFCA is defined in its constitution, which contains, among other things, the so-called 'one-third rule,' which is heavily criticized by the ATİB. This clause lays out provisions which regulate the linguistic and ethnic composition of the IFCA bodies.

[6] Diyanet itself was established in Turkey in 1924 and is today subordinated directly to the presidency (Grabherr et al., 2019, 40)

[7] Around 75.000 members and around 60 sub-associations (Bauer, 2016, 23f).

[8] The Hanafi School is one of the four schools of law in jurisprudence within Sunni Islam. It uses reason, logic, opinion, analogy, and preference in the formulation of laws and is distinguished from the other schools through its relatively liberal doctrines (Oxford Islamic Studies Online, n.d.).

[9] The Austrian Constitutional Court declared this as unconstitutional and the restriction of rights to members of the Hanafi School of Law was lifted (ORF, 2020, September 15)

The IFCA Community Committee consists of nine members, at least half of whom are supposed to have Austrian citizenship, and not more than a third of whom may belong to a different ethnic and linguistic group (Grabherr et. al, 2019, 42; Stricker, 2008, 9; IGGÖ, n.d.).

Although various Austrian institutions accepted the special status of ATİB as a part of Turkish diplomacy, the organization is often considered to be too close to AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government. In its early years, ATİB was perceived as being oriented against conservative Islamic associations. Later, however, there was an emerging consensus that the AKP had begun to infiltrate the Diyanet leadership with party supporters and to assert its influence, both in Turkey and among the diaspora, with a conservative interpretation of Islam (Grabherr et al. 2016, 42f). According to Çitak, the Turkish government is trying to establish a sort of religious monopoly, in order to promote Turkish Islam and consolidate national unity among the Turkish diaspora. This is in stark contrast to the ambitions of other governments in Europe to create 'European Islam' (Çitak, 2013, 169). Aslan claims that due to its size, ATİB has many members in the IFCA steering committee which is believed to enable it to expand its influence on Muslim and Turkish communities in Austria (Arslan, 2015; Aslan et al., 2017). He attributes the high level of participation of Austrian Turks in the 2015 and 2018 elections to the influence of ATİB (Aslan, 2018, 2f).

The attempted coup d'état in Turkey in 2016 was met by widespread public condemnation of the Gülen movement and calls to boycott the institutions of its members. This in turn has led to indignation by Austrian party officials, and the initiation of proceedings to investigate whether the imams of Diyanet are agents of the Turkish government (Aslan, 2018, 8). Another trigger for a public debate about the ATİB was an event in 2018, when uniformed children in a Vienna mosque belonging to the ATİB re-enacted the 1915/1916 Battle of Gallipoli (*Çanakkale* Savaşı) (Wiener Zeitung, 2018, April 20). Although the AKP is accused of using religion and nationalism as foreign policy tools (Ipek, 2015; Ozturk, 2016; Ozturk, 2018; Ozturk and Sozeri, 2018), Islamophobia researcher and political scientist Hafez claims that the AKP has no real religious base. Until recently, it consisted of various political movements such as the Milli Görüs, the Gülen movement, the Sufi Squad, and others. There are also factions within the party which, while nationalistic, are not religiously conservative or associated with political Islam (Hafez, 2017, February 27).

According to Muhasilovic (2020, 103ff), Turkey's faith-based diplomacy under the AKP differs from Western models by using the Presidency of Religious Affairs as the official public diplomacy state institution. However, this has created suspicion around the party's political influence in Austria, and as Nye (2004) points out, no country likes to feel manipulated, even by soft power. Grabherr et al. (2016, 42f) write that the political developments in Turkey do not necessarily have to be reflected in main features of the ATİB in Austria, and that all ATİB functionaries cannot be automatically assumed to have close connections with the AKP. The ATİB itself repeatedly emphasizes its apolitical status and insists that it does not tolerate politics of any party in its associations. In 2017, ATİB publicly distanced itself from some positions of the Turkish government and for the first time, a non-diplomat was elected chairman.

The Changing Law for Muslims (Islamgesetz 2015) in Austria and Islamophobia on the Rise

Parallel to the discussions about the Turkish public diplomacy intuition ATİB in Austria, the debate around changing the Law on Islam from 1912 began in the Austrian public and parliament. In 2015, a new Islam Law was enacted, under the pretext of preventing foreign political and theological influences, as well as to promote an understanding of Islam based on Austrian and European values. The main regulation of federal law on the external legal relationships of Islamic religious societies in the 2015 Islam Law concerned the legal status of Islamic Religious Societies, including their structure, rights, and obligations, as well as their relations with the Austrian state. Among these societies are the Islamic Community in Austria and the Islamic Alevi Community. Among other things, the 2015 Islam Law also regulates important issues like the protection of the religion's name, pastoral care, Islamic teleological studies, Islamic graveyards, regulation on the interdiction of foreign financing, dietary rules, and the presentation of teachings and sources of faith in the German language (RIS, 23.04.2020; Federal Chancellery, n.d.). However, the most important intention of the Law is to train imams in Austria (§6 and §24 Islam Law 2015). Another noteworthy regulation places emphasis on a positive general attitude towards society and the state (§11.3 Islam Law). It is also important to keep in mind that "teachings, institutions and customs are not allowed to contradict statutory rules" and that, in that case, the recognition can be taken back (RIS, 23.04.2020; Federal Chancellery, n.d.). This was, among other

things, a direct attack on the public diplomacy intuition ATİB, who would no longer be allowed to receive funding from Turkey, and whose imams employed in Austria would be denied any extension of their residency permits.

In 2021, an initiative started to change the 2015 Islam Law, which was launched as a part of an anti-terror package. Suggesting tighter legislation, the main amendments proposed by the reforms would introduce better control of funding sources of Islamic Religious Societies, an easier process for the closing down of mosques and religious community centers, and means of accessing precise information about which imam is preaching were. This would give the Office of Churches and Religions more control over the IFCA (Religion ORF.at 2021). The Amendment passed the Austrian National Parliament and is currently being discussed by the Federal Council (Republik Österreich Parlament, n.d.).

The efforts to tighten the 2015 Islam Law, in conjunction with public debates and political discourse accompanying this decision, indicate growing levels of Islamophobia in Austrian society. This has been galvanized considerably through the new discussions about the proposed amendment. As demonstrated in a 2018 study on Islamophobia, conducted by the University of Salzburg, hostility towards Muslims in Austria has increased substantially in recent years. 70% of Austrian citizens think that Islam does not fit into the Western world, and the majority of Austrians support stricter regulations on the practice of Islam. Additionally, 45% of respondents reported that they were in favor of denying Muslims certain rights.[10] When we take into account that, according to data from 2016, 700.000 Muslims live and pay taxes in Austria, a number that has consistently trended upwards (Wolfgang Aschauer, n.d.) the attitudes of the general population towards Muslims and Islam become an even more delicate issue.

Numerous examples of these trends can be observed in the political discourse of prominent Austrian politicians surrounding the public diplomacy institute ATİB and the 2015 Islam Law and its proposed amendment. Before the Law was implemented for example, MP Mag. Ewald Stadler (Alliance for the Future of Austria, BZÖ) posed an inquiry (Parlamentarische Materialien, n.d.) to the Austrian parliament in 2011, arguing that the last

[10]The study was conducted with 1.200 respondents, about the opinion of Muslims in Austria.

IFCA elections represented an agenda of Turkish domination through lobbying by the ATİB.

He went on to criticize ATİB representative Mr. Bozkus his statements that ATİB "is not an association dealing with integration," that the "German language does not in itself represent integration," and that Austrian policy needed to be assigned greater "responsibility when it meets integration." Furthermore, he complains about the fact that prayers in ATİB mosques are still performed in Turkish and that there is no German version of the ATİB homepage. He also points out that Bozkus works as a religious official of a foreign state ministry. By comparing MP Stadler's representation of Bozkus' statements with the original interview which Boskuz gave in the Austrian newspaper 'Die Presse' (Kocina, 2011, June 3), we are able to conclude that these quotes were taken out of context.

Based on these allegations, MP Stadler questions the Islam Law of 1912 and asks the Minister for European and International Affairs 21 more questions in this parliamentary debate. These questions are primarily related to the reform of that law, examining whether the IFCA is pursuing the agendas of private associations. He also questions whether there are grounds for the existence of ATİB, as a state body of Turkey, in Austria. We can clearly observe here how the suspicion of the ATİB and of IFCA itself is based on the decontextualized statements of the ATİB representative and the victory of ATİB within the IFCA elections. Furthermore, these arguments are used to mobilize support for the initiative to amend the Islam Law of 1912 by the MP. In light of the fact that the ATİB only joined the IFCA in 2011, these statements can be understood as expressions of fear regarding the ATİB's level of influence in the IFCA, as well as an outgrowth of competition among Austria's radical right-wing parties and Islamophobic campaigns[11] (Hafez, 2018, 8).

It is not only Austrian politicians who catalyze debates around foreign influence in the country. The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said at a 2014 pre-election campaign event in Austria for example that "Turks in Europe are the grandchildren of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent," and proclaimed "You can be proud of this Turkey" (Herger, 2014, June 19). Such rhetoric provides ample opportunity for right-wing parties in Austria,

[11]The MP's party, Alliance for the Future of Austria, came about through the break with the with the radical right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ).

who are eager to manipulate such statements to imply the impossibility of Turkish integration due to Turkish nationalism, or a supposed loyalty to Turkey which supersedes their Austrian patriotism. Similarly, such rhetoric fuels accusations that the ATİB is involved in Turkish elections. A related discourse is embodied by the statements of the former Austrian Minister of Integration, Sebastian Kurz (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP). At the time of the implementation of the Islam Law 2015, he repeatedly emphasized the need for an Islam with "Austrian characteristics" (Dietrich, 2015, September 22). In a later statement, he claimed that "parallel society, political Islam and radicalization have no place in our country." and that the law would be a "step against political Islam" (Deutsche Welle, 2018, June 8). From his statements, we can affirm the discursive construction of an 'Austrian Islam,' with 'Austrian characteristics' and under the control of the Austrian state. This 'Austrian Islam' is represented as the 'good Islam,' and juxtaposed to 'bad Islam,' manifested in Muslim associations founded abroad. His framing has the potential to incite Islamophobia in Austrian society by suggesting the latter organizations have radicalizing potential and should be held under general suspicion. This is also an example how Turkey's soft power efforts are dismissed as an attempt to manipulate Austrian population.

After the implementation of the 2015 Islam Law, an ATİB spokesman criticizes the quick implementation of the financing of the imams from abroad, stating

"we have demanded that we have at least three to five years of transition, with which we can also pay off the imams from Turkey. Now we have to pay the imams ourselves and financially that is a big challenge for the individual associations." (Auerbach, 2017, April 5).[12]

Considering that other religious communities, such as the Russian Orthodox Church for example, are allowed to be financed from abroad (Dietrich, 2015, September 22), the provision in the 2015 Islam Law which bans Muslim associations from accepting foreign funds also constitutes discrimination against Muslim religious associations.

On the other hand, the spokesman expressed enthusiasm for the day when Austrian-educated imams are in office, because

[12]Translated by the author.

"the children understand the Turkish language less and less, it is important that they understand what is being preached. And it is important to us that the imams also receive an excellent German education." (Auerbach, 2017, April 5).[13]

His moderate attitude, in the end, may be connected to the fact that, apart being an ATİB spokesperson, he was also a politician of the Austrian People's Party. The fact remains that the new Islam Law came into force in 2015, and the education of Imams in Austria began in the autumn of 2018. The portrayal of all Muslims in Austria as a potential danger is accompanied by acts such as when the Minister of Integration, Susane Rab, (Austrian People's Party) recently presented a "state map of Islam," which identified mosques and organizations, the names of their leaders, and their international connections (ORF 2 27.05.2021). This was heavily criticized by, among others, the Austrian Catholic Church (DerStandard, 2021, June 1) and is reminiscent of a dark past in Austria.

According to Hafez (2010), right-wing parties see the topic of integration and political Islam as an opportunity to collect political points. This precipitates distrust and hostility towards Muslims and Islam and has an impact on the perceptions and feelings of the country's Muslims. In the 2012 study 'Muslims in Austria,' the authors conclude that six out of ten Muslims felt that they were (at least temporarily) disadvantaged in Austria because of their religion (Bauer, 2016, 38).

Constitutional lawyers strongly criticize the Islam Law 2015 for violating the principle of equality by discriminatory treatment of Muslims relative to other religious communities (ibd, 2016, 4), who, for example, are not subject to financial prohibitions in Austria (ORF, 2014, October 3). The law has also been characterized by one Islamic legal scholar as "somewhat excessive legislation that may also violate the European Convention on Human Rights," and as driven by the "basic political direction of a great skepticism about Islam" (Deutsche Welle, 2018, June 8). Hafez sees the new restrictions as "institutionalized Islamophobia," (Hafez, 2017, February 27) and criticizes the common stereotyping of Muslims as disloyal to the state (Hafez, 2014, November 3).

Integration politics have proven highly controversial in Austria. When it comes to immigrant integration, religion is also heavily politicized. The

[13] Translated by the author.

initiatives are largely driven by the concern that Islam is a potential political problem and is incompatible with Western society. The loyalty and values of Muslim citizens, who view themselves as Europeans, are regularly questioned (Shakir, 2017, 191). It is important to bear in mind the fact that as the Austrian model of religious governance is changing, origin-oriented faith-based Muslim minority organizations will become even more relevant. If the state does not succeed in facilitating sustainable integration into society, migrants will turn to those organizations in pursuit of their rights, and these organizations will offer them a social network. The aim of the Austrian government should be to promote equality and integration in Austria, while seeking a balance between assimilation and cultural imperialism (Nye, 2011, 87). This could be done in cooperation with those associations as well as faith-based public diplomacy institutions. In the words of Nye: "Soft power need not to be a zero-sum game in which one country's gain is necessarily another country's loss" (ibd., 2011, 90).

Conclusion

Since the Second World War, the number of Muslim migrants arriving to live and work in Austria has continue to rise, creating a need for organized religious representation. In 1990, the Turkish faith-based public diplomacy institution ATİB was established in Austria, as a branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, Diyanet. With over 60 Turkish imams in Austria, ATİB was tasked with attending to the religious needs of the Turkish diaspora. Over the past two decades, as the conservative AKP party has consolidated power in Turkey, suspicions that the ATİB is being used as an instrument of the AKP agenda have sparked heated debates in Austrian politics. However, the implementation of the new Islam Law in 2015 led to significant changes in the ATİB's operations. They are no longer allowed to employ imams from Turkey, or to receive foreign funding. These restrictions have resulted in financial difficulties for the institution as well as upended the lives of Turkish imams working in Austria. The extent to which these restrictions are justified by any concrete effort on the part of the Turkish government to instrumentalize the ATİB as a part of a malign foreign policy agenda remains a subject of political controversy. The debates engendered by this controversy have inevitably exacerbated underlying Islamophobia in Austrian society, which calls for extensive monitoring.

The present research has employed critical discourse analysis to demonstrate the link between the debate surrounding the public diplomacy institution ATİB, the 2015 Islam Law, and growing Islamophobia in Austrian society. By examining the statements of Austrian officials, it becomes clear that constructions of Islam as a political threat and incompatible with European values is an enormous aspect of the debates around faith-based public diplomacy institutions, religious restrictions, and integration policy. The politics and policies of 'restriction,' the politicization of Islam in the context of migration issues, and the portrayal of Muslim migrants as disloyal or a political threat to the Austrian state are all damaging practices by which politicians in Austria galvanize Islamophobic sentiment. Going forward, policy makers should understand the potential of their rhetoric and efforts to tighten restrictions on Muslim communities to intensify Islamophobia.

To this end, the present research has identified problems that should guide policy makers dealing with issues of integration in cooperation with migrants' associations and faith-based institutions. Austrian decision makers should involve representatives of all major associations in the decision-making process given that these associations are not all equally represented in the IFCA. Greater exchange between government officials involved in integration policy and representatives of Muslim communities in Austria is an essential part of this process. In dealing with contentious issues such as radicalization and foreign influence, cooperation between these two sectors is especially vital in order to avoid fomenting Islamophobia or resentment and ensure an equitable policy towards migrants and minorities in Austrian society.

Finally, in regards to soft power, this paper has shown that Turkey's public diplomacy strategy as embodied in the ATİB in Austria, is an example of "soft disempowerment." The actual Turkish government has acquired a largely negative reputation in Western countries like Austria, despite its expansive faith-based public diplomacy efforts like the ATİB. The assumed close ties between the ATİB and the ruling AKP party have engendered suspicion in Austrian society that this supposedly cultural and religious institution is actually pursuing a Turkish political agenda in Austria. This suspicion in turn generates fear of foreign influence in Austrian politics, and more specifically, distrust and negative perceptions of the Turkish state, as evidenced by the discourse analysis presented in this article.

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